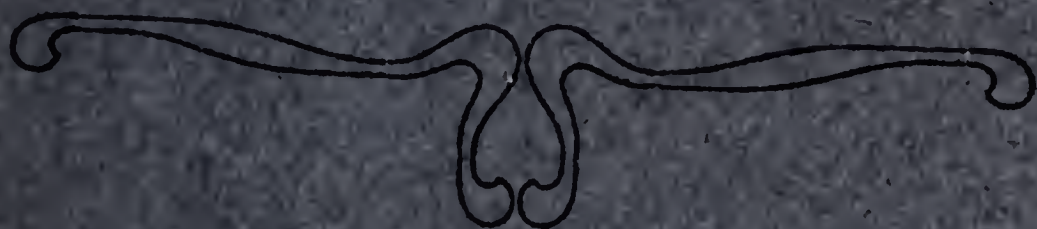


POTTERY LORE



NUMBER
ONE

PALISSY, THE POTTER
AND
HAJI, THE ARTIST IN CLAY
BY
W. P. JERVIS

author of
The Encyclopedia of Ceramics, Etc.

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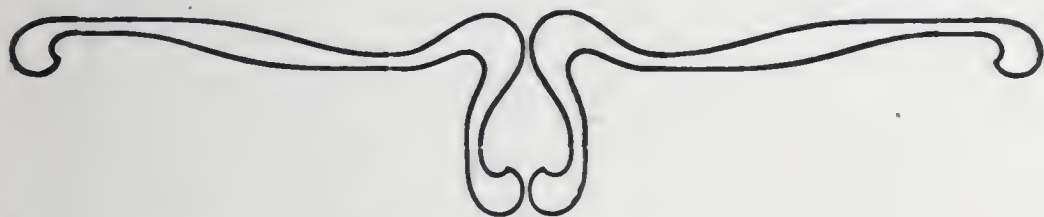
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"Truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at open door."
—Pope.



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Palissy, The Potter



HE boyhood years had scarcely passed away when Bernard Palissy and his newly made bride turned their backs on the little village of La Chapelle Biron and took up their abode in the more pretentious town of Saintes. The preceding years had been for Palissy years of bitter fight for an existence, but had enriched him with much knowledge, a knowledge all self-acquired. The ignorance of youth, when knowledge came only to those who ardently sought it, was not easily dissipated, but Palissy had within him a soul which found inspiration in the flow of the river, the opening of a flower and the blue of the sky. The dreamer, lulled to contentment by the song of the birds, the mysterious silence of the woods, awoke and gave place to the student of indomitable will, who supplemented the knowledge he surely though slowly acquired by a philosophical train of thought which foreshadowed the philosopher of later years. From his father he had learned the trade of glass painting, a not very remunerative trade in the little village, and to this he added land surveying, a much more congenial employment for a youth of Palissy's temperament, for it took him into the open air.

If beneath the forest boughs or by the side of the river he dreamed a little, his work was by no means neglected, and a measurable degree of prosperity—the prosperity of a French peasant, who was satisfied with little—came to him. But La Chapelle Biron had its limitations, and Palissy felt that in the world beyond there was much knowledge to be gained, and one morning, with but a scanty purse, he started out on his travels. The several provinces of his native country were explored, and afterward Germany and Flanders were visited. As he traveled he studied chemistry and natural history, in the meantime working at his joint trades for his support. Enriched with the knowledge he had gained he returned to his native place, and one evening in the spring of the year, when the trees were a mass of snowy blossoms, when the ringdove cooed to his mate and all the earth was a mass of billowy verdure, he told his love to Jehane as they sat side by side in the ingلهook—a story so old that the moon, peeping in at the window, faintly blinked at hearing it so well told, but so new to the blushing girl that the moonbeams, falling on the floor, seemed the path to Paradise—a path she and Bernard were to travel the remainder of their lives. Poor fools! They never dreamed that the clouds might obscure the moon, that storms would come and darkness, a darkness so impenetrable that love's lamp would be unable to pierce the gloom, and that no single star would gleam forth as a harbinger of promise. But fortunately love is blind, and in due course they were married in the little church, he in the consciousness of his knowledge, she in the contentment of ignorance, and the old cure' gave them his

blessing, a little more sincerely and heartily than the usual perfunctory one, for he had long been the friend and mentor of Palissy, giving freely of his scanty store of knowledge. This friendship and intimacy was one of Jehane's greatest delights, for no one, not even the lord in the great house on the hill, dared to dispute the cure's word, but Bernard, her Bernard, discussed matters with the good father with a freedom and eloquence that sometimes forced the cure' into an untenable position—a victory Palissy, with rare discrimination for one so young, never pushed to his own advantage. Nay, once had he not attacked a ruling of Holy Mother Church, which left the priest so much food for reflection that it choked all food in his mouth, and so, like a wise man, he took refuge in a dignified silence?

So in the egotism of youth and the intoxication of a realized love they took up their abode at Saintes, that wider field for Palissy's ambition, and where they confidently looked forward to fame and fortune. Poor Jehane! Little did she dream of the many years of privation and penury or the look of exaltation would have faded from her face, the lovelight in her eyes be ever dimmed—for poverty is the foe of love—as she stood by the horse's head whilst Bernard unloaded their few possessions from the wagon, and they entered their new home. For a time all went well. The little town was rich in historical associations, with its evidences of its occupation by the Romans, the Arch of Germanicus; the amphitheater, where men fought savagely with no less savage beasts; where gladiators came and fought to the death, and where life was taken or spared by the turning of a thumb.

Then there was the church of St. Eutropesus, with its large, handsomely embellished crypt, which had buffeted the storms and withstood the tempests, not without many a scar, it is true, since its building in the sixth century, a monument to the craftsmanship of its builders. (This church was remodeled and restored in the sixteenth century.) Truly there were giants in those days. Another church there was, that of Notre Dame, modern as compared with that of St. Eutropesus, but with an antiquity all its own, dating as it did, from the eleventh century. What a rich field was here for such a man as Palissy. But Saintes had a greater antiquity than either of the churches proved, for it was the ancient Medislanum, the chief city of the Santones, before the Romans, in their irresistible course, captured and occupied it. All these things delighted Palissy's heart, and if Jehane had not quite so much reverence for their antiquity, their noble proportions awed her and gave her the desire to bend the knee. So when their first child was born to them their cup of happiness seemed filled to the brim.

Amongst the acquaintances Palissy made in Saintes was that of the keeper of a wineshop and restaurant, La Rose Rouge, by name Louis Dupont, distinguished above his fellows inasmuch as he could both read and write, an honest enough fellow and warm-hearted withal, who would have made a good craftsman if his environment had not led him to a less noble calling, but La Maison Rouge had been kept by his father before him, who in turn inherited it from his father. And now he was looking forward to a quiet old age, when Louis, his son, would succeed him. In the evenings it was usual for many of the neigh-

bors to meet here, and, over a game of dominoes and a bottle of wine, discuss the news of the day, or Palissy would often entertain them with an account of his travels. Sometimes the mayor himself would drop in to give tone to the gathering, but on such occasions the proceedings were of a more dignified character, and words were weighed before they were uttered. Occasionally the Duponts would tender their boat for a ride on the River Charente, and so an intimacy grew up between the families which afterward had an important bearing upon Palissy's career.

One day a traveler from Nuremburg stopped at Saintes, the guest of the mayor, and the two in the evening strolled down to La Rose Rouge. The traveler had with him a small piece of pottery covered with a beautiful white enamel, totally unlike anything any of the inhabitants of the place had ever seen before. When Palissy saw it its artistic beauty appealed strongly to him, and it was with difficulty he could bring himself to restore it to its owner, and only gave it up with a sigh of regret. If he could only produce that, a thing so beautiful that it might well grace the palace of a king, it would be something that would live, would have a value which would free him from the monotony of his poorly paid work and give him the opportunity to acquire more knowledge himself and the means of relieving Jehane from tasks she performed willingly enough but which were wearing alike upon her physique and beauty. The thought haunted him and he confided in his wife and afterward in his friend Dupont, but neither of them understood or guessed half how strongly the idea had obtained mastery of him. But the task required time and cap-

ital, neither of which could he devote to it, for his time must be spent in earning to maintain the rapidly increasing family, and of capital he had none. His acumen seems to have deserted him, for it would have been possible to have obtained some little information as to the composition of the enamel, some hints as to its application and firing, but he ignored the experiments of others, and though he knew absolutely nothing of pottery, he determined by assiduous application and experiment to make up for his lack of technical knowledge, and, "groping in the dark," as he himself expresses it, he commenced his experiments.

As a glass painter, Palissy must have been familiar with certain ingredients common to both glass making and pottery, though this may have been the little knowledge which was a dangerous thing. Before he could experiment on the composition of the enamel he needed the pottery on which to apply it, for he had no knowledge of clays, so in the small village of Chapelle-aux-pots (where up to the present day an excellent clay is found), where pottery covered with a blue glaze was made, and which at that period was considered worthy of presentation to kings, he studied as best he might the forming of these vessels and the manner of firing them, soon acquiring as much knowledge as the potters themselves possessed. His journeying there and the time spent in helping the potters at their work left him with an empty purse, and night after night he saw Jehane's face grow more sad, though he never knew how much she had denied herself in order to provide the scanty food for himself and the little children.

Matters were indeed looking doleful, when for-

tune—fickle jade that she is—tempted him with an alluring prospect, which would provide him with funds to build a kiln of his own and continue his quest. He was employed to make a survey and plan of the salt marshes of Saintonge, and received a considerable sum of money for his work. The regular employment, his life in the open air, seemed to have lifted a load from his mind; his step was lighter, his walk was more erect, and the old soft tones returned to his voice as he spoke to Jehane, and she, the bride of five years, took heart of grace and thought and hoped that he had forgotten about the little cup, and burnt a big candle to her patron saint in happy thankfulness. The children had now sufficient food, her days of self-denial were over, and if for a time Bernard had seemed less wise than usual, he again became glorified in her eyes. Old friends had fallen away from them, or perhaps had been repelled by her pride, for not one of them knew of her heroic self-denial when the food she hungered for went to stay the cries of her little children. Now, when prosperity smiled, friends smiled too, and life seemed again a foretaste of heaven.

As for Palissy, he was in sore straits. He saw the happiness of Jehane and understood its cause, but his ardor was unabated, and never for a moment did he relinquish his purpose to find the secret of the enamel. He had intended to straightway build a kiln, but the primrose path of dalliance lured him for a moment, as who, looking into Jehane's eyes, would not have lingered? And he contented himself with some experiments he had fired in a glass maker's furnace. In one of these firings a single piece came out

“white and polished.” Half wild with excitement he hurried to La Rose Rouge and displayed his treasures to his friend Dupont. His enthusiasm was contagious, and together they went to Palissy’s house to display the treasure to Jehane. A great fear arose in her heart when she saw it, for she knew her rival would triumph and that Palissy was again lost to her. In her mind’s eye she saw them wandering in the woods and fields, listening to him as he lovingly named each natural object they saw, or he was seated by the fire-side, the children at his knee wondering at the beautiful stories he told them, and how later she had sat by his side in the ingle-nook, talking very little, but happy in his mere presence. She dully wondered if ever such times would return again, and with a strange iteration her heart would answer her, “No more, Jehane, no more forever.” But what was her happiness to his success? So she bravely kept back the tears and listened patiently and tried to understand the plan of the kiln which Palissy with a piece of chalk outlined on the table, and which he would start to build on the morrow. Jehane’s mood communicated itself by degrees to Palissy, but fighting against it he said to himself, “Why art thou sad since thou hast found what thou wast seeking for? Work now and thou wilt shame thy detractors.” So on the morrow he commenced building the kiln, and though the progress was slow, for he was entirely unaided, it was eventually finished and ready to fire. But the construction proved faulty, and the gases made by the fuel were not of the required quality, and the whole of the contents were ruined. But Palissy was a philosopher, and far from being cast down by his failures,

more painful than his former ones on account of the gleam of hope the single successful piece had given him, he "thought to himself that the duty of a man who had fallen into a moat was to try and raise himself up again;" so again he returned to his trades of glass making and land measuring; again was there hope in Jehane's heart, for to her every failure was a victory. So in time a little money was accumulated, a loan from Dupont repaid, some few other debts discharged, and the old passion returned again, the kiln was demolished and another one commenced which he hoped would remedy the defects of the last one. Palissy's health at this time was none of the best, and he was obliged to hire a helper, who was kept in food by his friend Dupont, but at the end of six months he was under the necessity of discharging him, giving him clothes from his scanty wardrobe in part payment of his wages.

Matters had indeed grown to desperate straits. His credit was exhausted; his friends estranged; death had knocked at his door and taken away his children one after another (the malicious said they had starved to death); Jehane, whose very presence had in the years gone by seemed an idyl in itself, was now an offense to him, for the sorrow ever lurking in her eyes appalled him, and he grew irritated and angry at her slightest reproach. For Jehane, in spite of her love and faith in her husband, had slowly grown discouraged, though ashamed that her faith should be less than that of Dupont, who steadfastly through all the years of disappointment and failures had never wavered in his friendship, never refused help when it was possible to give it.

Marie, the old blanchisseuse, who laboriously beat the clothes to snowy whiteness in the waters of the Charante, and whose husband had with great regularity pocketed the bulk of her earnings, smiled in pity. Saglier, the avocat, took snuff rapidly and swore a mighty oath because so much ability should go to waste and be expended on a foolish quest; the cure' prayed with fervor that the evil spirit might be exorcised and Palissy return to his senses. The workmen, as they drank and smoked at Lahocbe's estaminet, congratulated their respective wives on the possession of husbands who had sense enough to work at their respective callings instead of "groping in the dark" after the unattainable. Monsieur le Maire had had serious doubts as to whether or not his duty did not call on him to have Palissy placed under restraint, but when the two men met, as they occasionally did, the beautiful philosophy, the acute reasoning and the erudition of the one dissipated the doubts of the other, though these same doubts invariably returned almost before he had ceased to hear Palissy's retreating footsteps. "Strange indeed," mused the official, "that a man so learned and sane on all other subjects should be so crazy over a bit of pottery." And though in Palissy the symptoms were exaggerated, he is not the only one who has suffered from the same disease.

For sixteen long years, with a perseverance and tenacity of purpose unparalleled in the annals of industrial art, Palissy pursued his experiments, sometimes encouraged by a gleam of hope, but for the main part having to face one failure after another, but through it all his indomitable will held him on his course, and at no time did he seriously contemplate

the abandonment of his project. Financially he was at the lowest possible ebb, and the morning arrived when he had to face the fact that unless success came then it was perforce the end of it all. Not even for the necessities of life could he obtain credit, much less for fuel to fire the kiln. The little heap of wood which Dupont had provided—Dupont who was now nearly as poor as himself—seemed ridiculously inadequate, especially when he reflected that the few last firings were rich in promise if they only could have been carried to a higher heat. His failures passed rapidly through his mind. Once he felt sure it was but the unequal distribution of the heat that marred the enamel; another time the pebbles in the mortar used in building the kiln flew in splinters on his ware; the ashes ruined another lot, and as for most of the others they were simply dire and dismal failures, failures of the worst kind, for they failed to teach him anything. Of the known defects he was sure they had been remedied, and now—if he only had enough wood!

The firing progressed; the kiln, with its insatiable maw, swallowed up the last stick and still the enamel had not fused. With a desperation akin to madness, Palissy tore down the doors of his house and thrust them in the kiln mouth; the flooring of the rooms followed, every vestige of wood about the place was consumed and still without result. The news had spread abroad and attracted an unruly crowd; his wife and children in vain implored him to desist; the mob howled imprecations on his head. The mayor forced his way through the crowd, but Palissy waived him ruthlessly aside. Dupont looked on, torn with conflicting emotions, pity for Jehane, a dogged loyalty

for his friend. Still the enamel had not fused, and Palissy, undaunted by his surroundings, seized the little remaining furniture left to them and sacrificed it to the flames. Who shall venture to say what his thoughts were or with what impatience he waited for the kiln to cool? Or describe his emotions when, on opening it, he found success had come at last? Strong man as he was, his hands trembled as he handed the pieces to his friend Dupont; the tears came to his eyes as he looked at and caressed the precious pieces. He stumbled into the house and in exultation called, "Jehane, Jehane." He placed his treasures in her hands, turned his face to the wall and gave vent to his pent emotions. For a moment Jehane dully wondered if she were glad or sorry, then approaching him and putting her arms around his neck, kissed him in silence and then led him gently down to the river and rowed him over to the woods beyond, carrying the pieces with her. If they were his altar, had she not been the sacrificial flame? So in the beauty and silence of the woods we will leave them, nor stay to listen to the Te Deum that fills the aisles of the forest and brought peace to the poor bruised hearts.

* * * * *

A new era dawned for this potter of indomitable will, and the mob was now ready to cheer where it had been wont to condemn. Of all his friends Dupont had alone remained faithful, and his faith in Palissy's ultimate success is almost as praiseworthy as Palissy's perseverance. The poverty-stricken home disappeared, love and happiness walked together and Palissy was recognized as more than a local celebrity, he was a national benefactor, for he had given France pottery

worthy of her greatness. His first production was the white enamel, followed by variegated glazes, and then came his crowning triumph, Rustiques Figulines. These consisted mostly of various shaped dishes, made more for decorative purposes than for actual use, and are ornamented in relief with natural objects, such as shells, lizards, snakes, fishes and leaves. All are most faithfully and naturally depicted, but the potter's art of the sixteenth century is far removed from that of the twentieth, and today such pieces would not be tolerated.

Previous to 1562 he embraced the Protestant religion, and having taken part in the riots which broke out at Saintonge in that year, he was arrested and imprisoned at Bordeaux and his workshop at Saintes was demolished by a mob. Through the intervention of the Constable de Montmorency he was liberated, the queen-mother conferring on him the title of "Inventeur des Rustiques Figulines du Roy," and thus becoming a member of the royal household he was outside the jurisdiction of the Parlement of Bordeaux. He then removed to La Rochelle, but not finding scope there for his genius and ambition, went soon afterward (A. D. 1565) to Paris. Under the patronage of Catherine de Medici and the Constable Montmorency he established a workshop in the Place du Carousal, and there executed some of his most famous works. In Paris he published several important works on natural science and gave lectures on scientific subjects which were attended by the most important men of the day. But Paris—the city of unrest—was surging with religious strife, and, betrayed by one of his associates, Palissy was arrested

and sent to prison. Most of his patrons were dead, but the influence of the Duc de Mayence delayed for a time the judicial proceedings, but he could not procure his release. His liberty was offered to him if he would recant, but the brave old potter had lost none of his indomitable will, and he died in the Bastile at the age of eighty, in the year 1590.

Haji, The Artist in Clay



H A J I

The Artist in Clay



HIS is a true story, if the iconoclasts will but let us have it so. Perhaps, who knows? the traditions of Dia Nippon are beneath their notice, and they will leave us Nomi-No Sukune', though they have shattered William Tell. To me the story will be always true and Nomi and the brave and beautiful Myosho, living, breathing personages, instinct with life, redolent with love and everything beautiful that love inspires. Such they are and always have been to the Japanese potter. For over seven hundred years the story was handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, until a dozen centuries ago the Emperor Temonu and the Empress Gemmyo caused their story to be embodied in the Great Chronicles of Japan, the Kojiki and the Nishongi.

Our story opens in the reign of the good Emperor Suinin, who strove more to encourage the arts and industries than to follow the warlike instincts of his father, whose hand had been lifted so heavily against the Ainos, or Prawn Barbarians, and those pit dwellers and cannibals, the Kiboto. For a new light was dawning in Dia Nippon, and Suinin and his father were both servants of the Grand Master of Things.

Once, indeed, was Suinin forced into war when his wife joined her brother in attempt to seize the crown, if, indeed, they wore crowns in those days. This conspiracy, which nearly cost him his life, instead of embittering him, as well it might have done, only seemed to make him more solicitous for the welfare of others. It chanced that he was sleeping, sleeping with his head resting on the lap of his loved empress, when she, thinking the opportunity propitious, raised aloft a dagger her brother had given her to slay him. He, all unconscious of such vile treachery, smiled in his sleep and whispered her name, so her courage failed her, the dagger was hastily concealed, and tears of grief and shame flooded her eyes and ran down upon his face. Awakened by her falling tears he took her tenderly in his arms and told her of a strange dream he had had. "A violent storm pursued me and beat upon my face and a damask colored snake coiled itself around my neck from which I could not release myself until your dear hands took it and flung it far away." The empress, momentarily conscience stricken, confessed the conspiracy, so Suinin collected his forces and marched against his brother. The empress, vacillating between her husband and her brother, her love dominated by her ambition, finally decided to throw in her lot with the latter, another mistake on the part of this interesting personage, for Suinin slew the rebellious prince and burned down his castle and the empress perished with him.

As the gods often send the most trouble to those who are strongest to bear it, a short time after, the emperor's youngest brother died, and as was the custom they buried with him all his living retainers that

he should not need for anything in the Great Beyond.* So in a circle round his grave they placed them in pits so that only their heads were left uncovered. Day and night were heard their agonizing cries as consumed with hunger and parched with thirst they cried aloud in the agonies of death. But none dared help them, and one by one their cries ceased as death stepped in to their release. And the heart of the emperor was sad within him and the new wife he had taken tried in vain to console him. In his sleep The Grand Master of Things appeared unto him and reviled him that he permitted such things to be. Four years afterward the empress died and the heart of the emperor being greatly moved he called all his counsellors together and asked them to propose some plan by which they could do away with the inhuman rites. But none could solve the difficulty.

Now, there lived at this time a potter named Nomi-No-Sukune', an honest fellow and clever at his trade, straight and lissom as a bamboo, light of laugh and song, and handsome as Prince Fire-Subside. And he and the beautiful Myosho, of the household of the empress, were betrothed. At the time of the death of the empress Nomi had gone to the north on a hunting expedition, for their bridal day was fast approaching and he wished to obtain for Myosho a fine bear skin as a token of his affection and a proof of his valor. So Myosho's father sent fast runners to bring Nomi back, that he might at least have the satisfaction of bidding her good bye. As the gods

*Motley in his "Rise and Fall of the Dutch Republic" states that this was also a Celtic custom.

willed it, Nomi had had good fortune and with the bear skin on his back was half way home when he met the runners, or perhaps this story would never have been told. Who can tell his grief and despair at the prospect of losing in such a horrible manner all he loved, all he lived for? The song that had been on his lips, the gladness that had filled his heart were gone and dumbly he wondered if they had ever existed. And when at last Myosho looked upon his face it was as if the snows of many winters had been upon him, and one strand in his lustrous black hair had turned perfectly white. She lay in his arms and rested her head upon his shoulder and looking up in his eyes whispered, "Heart of mine, do not grieve, it will soon be over;" but Nomi answered her never a word. "Nomi, dear Nomi," she repeated, "be brave and strong. The Grand Master of Things will help me, will help you." He strove to answer, but the words would not come, his head nodded from side to side as if uncontrolled by his will, his lips and throat were swollen and dry, his whole body inert, except once or twice when he felt the pressure of Myosho's arms around his neck and he momentarily recovered from his stupor and tightened his hold of her. What bitterness had death for him? She had no fear of death itself, but the horror of its surroundings, the vultures circling above, the wolves baying in the distance, and ever circling nearer and nearer; the tormenting thirst, the agony of that living tomb were enough to unnerve the strongest. And yet all her regret was that she was to leave Nomi. Nomi who had crowned her with the ume blossoms in the springtime; Nomi who had tamed and given her the fox; Nomi who had placed the

rings in her ears, whose lightest wish was law, who was at once her emperor and her religion. And so she clung passionately to him until the guards came and tore them apart! With bowed head and leaden feet the father of Myosho accompanied Nomi to his home, telling him of the emperor's attempt and failure to find some plan whereby they could do away with the horrible rites, but Nomi appeared not to hear him and sat on the ground, his head between his hands, that most pathetic of all pathetic pictures, a strong man in despair. Suddenly he raised his head, a gleam of hope was in his eyes, he jumped to his feet and with the energy born of despair began to prepare some clay. The stars peeping in at night saw him steadily working; the early dawn found him eagerly working still, but it was not before the sun was high above the horizon that his task was finished and what had been a shapeless mass of clay was now a life size figure of his loved Myosho. For eight and forty hours food had not touched his lips; he had traveled a long distance at a rapid rate, but he knew nothing of either hunger or fatigue. Hope and fear were strong within him as carefully carrying his model he made his way quickly to the palace and sought audience of the emperor. And what the wisdom of the whole of the counsellors had failed to suggest the love of the humble potter had conceived, for the compromise was accepted and Suinin ordered Nomi to make models of men, women and horses and decreed that they should be buried around the dead empress and that the practice should continue for all time. And to Nomi he gave many gifts and made him chief of the Clay Workers' Guild and ordered him to use and his chil-

dren after him the surname Haji, signifying "The Artist in Clay."

* * * * *

The sun is sinking, the twilight is deepening over the land and the snow-crowned crest of Fusi-yama looks like a shadow; the scent of the orange trees for which Suinin sent to China, but did not live to see, fills the air; the bamboos cast fantastic shadows, a cormorant stands fishing in the stream. Nomi and Myosho sit watching their children, great sturdy boys and lithe girls, playing around them; some memory of the past stirs the heart of Nomi and he speaks softly to his wife as his hand steals around her waist, and she looking up in his face with the love that age can not wither lighting her eyes, kisses his hand reverently and whispers, "Heart of Mine."



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